[Myron Buxton]

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COMMENTS

Berkshire [Borner?] George Dodge - Yankee >Odd Job Man Mass. 1938-9

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

NAME OF WORKER ROSALIE SMITH

ADDRESS PERU, MASSACHUSETTS

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SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME OF INFORMANT GEORGE DODGE

ADDRESS WORTHINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Mr. George Dodge, Worthington carpenter, mason and dirt farmer is typical of the many old Yankees who live in the hills of western Massachusetts. Although modern conveniences have brought them into closer contact with the city people than ever before, and every summer, crowds of vacationists invade their small towns, these hill towners retain many of the beliefs, customs and view points of an older era in American life. Some of them have learned by experience the value of such slogans as "price slashing," "we try to [please?]", "prices are lower here," "clearance prices touch bottom." But to most of them, there are no such words in their vocabulary. Mr. Dodge belongs to the latter group and it was undoubtedly this lack of sympathy with business methods of the city that prevented him from measuring up as a salesman, when he tended a Christmas tree stand in Springfield recently.

"I was down to Springfield selling Christmas trees at Christmas time. My sons and I have been cutting trees and picking evergreen for wreaths for some years now in the winter time. You know that's a big business up here in the hills. Most everybody takes a hand in cutting or hauling trees and fixing wreaths for sale. I heard one of the summer visitors here say once, 'You folks are a crowd of Santa Clauses. How wonderful.' I guess she wouldn't say it was so wonderful if she had to bend her back picking evergreen all day out in the woods when its mighty cold. But then, its not a bad business, and it fills in at the off season. We used to send our trees down to New York City to sell, but that's too much of a haul to make any profit on these days when times are bad and people don't buy so many trees. The past few years we've been selling our trees at a gas station down to Springfield. I go down to help sell the trees and I can tell you I don't like the work.

"Some of those women who came in to buy trees got on my nerves. They'd pretend to be so fussy and then they'd probably take the worst tree in the bunch in the end. They made me so mad. Why, one morning just when I was getting my trees out a woman came in and asked me if I would show her some. I asked her what size she wanted but she said she

didn't know. Well, I brought out at least sixty before she finally decided upon one. I must have spent almost an hour with her. Then she asked me if I would tag it for her and she said she would call for it that night. I told her I'd be glad to tag it, but that we 2 usually got paid for them when we tagged trees. No, she said she didn't want to pay for it then; her word was good, she said and she'd be back that night. I didn't want to set it aside, but I did. Well, about nine o'clock that night she and her husband came in and I said, 'Oh, yes, I remember you. Your tree is right over here.' Her husband looked at the tree and said he didn't like it. 'there's the tag,' I said, 'Your wife wrote it, and I've saved it for you; and I may have lost the sale of that tree to someone else.' The man said he didn't like it, and as they were walking off I said, 'You're about the cheapest skate I ever saw.' I don't suppose I should have said it, but I was so mad I couldn't help it." He sounded almost as penitent as a small boy reluctantly apologizing to a playmate, whom he had given a black eye.

"And another time " continued Mr. Dodge," a woman came in and said she would like to see some of my fifty - cent trees. I think I showed her forty or fifty and still she couldn't decide on one, so finally I said, 'Madam, I just can't afford to spend any more time with you looking over this pile, because the profit on a fifty cent tree isn't ten cents, and I have another customer waiting, so if you'll just keep looking them over and when you find one you like, bring it to me and I'll take care of it. 'And then I walked off and left her. She looked mad and I thought she was going to leave, but she didn't. A few minutes later she brought me over a tree. "[Mr. Dodge may not have been able to cope with the vagaries of women shoppers, but when it came to a sound, business-like, man-to-man 3 deal, he was much more successful.] [?] "When I first got down to Springfield," he said, "I didn't know just where to get my meals, but the man at the gas station told me they served good food, at fairly reasonable prices, at a saloon right around the corner. I went in there one day and got my dinner and after I'd finished eating I went up to the manager and told him that I had a Christmas tree stand right near there and that I was going to be in town about two weeks; and that I would greatly appreciate it if he and his help would buy their trees from me; and if they would I would be glad to patronize him all the time I was there. He said he

couldn't be bothered with Christmas trees. He always let his wife attend to that. 'All right,' I said and walked out. The next day I went across the street and ate at his competitor's place; and after I'd finished eating I put the same proposition up to the manager there. He was very pleasant and agreeable and he said he'd be very glad to patronize me. I ate at his place every day I was there; and I think that he sent me almost thirty customers.

"One thing I don't like about selling things down in the city is the haggling over prices. When I have a thing to sell, I put a price on it and that's the price I'll sell it for - no more and no less. If I can't sell it at my price, then I don't sell it - I'll give it away. A few years ago I made about two hundred gallons of maple syrup. After figuring out expenses and profit I set the price at \$1.75 a gallon, and sold 175 gallons without any trouble. A man down in Chester offered to take the twenty-five gallons I had left at \$1.50 a gallon. I told 4 him my price was \$1.75, take it or leave it. He didn't take it. I gave most of it away to friends and neighbors. I can't see anything in this modern method of cutting prices. You know how much you have to take on a proposition, and that's all there is to it." [Mr. Dodge had just come back from tending the Springfield stand for the last time this year. He was stretched out on the studio couch with [Mickie?], his bulldog at his side, relaxed and at ease. His brown eyes twinkled as he said, "I'm just as glad that job's over for another year. I don't care so much for the city - it isn't] home."